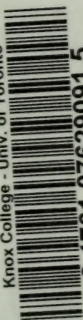


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# BISHOP GORE'S CHALLENGE TO CRITICISM

A REPLY TO THE BISHOP OF OXFORD'S  
OPEN LETTER ON THE BASIS OF  
ANGLICAN FELLOWSHIP

BY

W. SANDAY, D.D., F.B.A.

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THERE are two things that I greatly regret about this pamphlet. It has to serve a double purpose. A situation had suddenly arisen in the Church which acutely touched myself, and I felt it impossible to keep silence. A word seemed demanded from me on the public issue ; but at the same time I had to clear my conscience by explaining frankly where I stood in relation to that issue. From my published books I might easily be thought to hold a position somewhat different from that which I actually hold at the present time. It is a development rather than a change ; and I had made arrangements for explaining the nature of the development. But these arrangements have had to be anticipated. I felt that I must come out into the open at once. But that involved the unfortunate consequence that I had to make my statement under stress of controversy, and that I had to make it in a way that must seem abrupt and unprepared. There is more detailed work than appears behind this pamphlet ; and I shall doubtless have to treat the subject more at length. Only the essential points can be set down here.

Events have moved rather too fast for me. When I began this pamphlet I did not realize that the decision would be upon us quite so soon. I wrote to deprecate the declaration asked for by Dr. Gore ; and while these pages have been passing through the press the declaration has practically been made, in the answer of the Upper House of Convocation to certain memorials presented to it. It seemed only right and respectful to wait for the publication of the Bishops' resolutions and of the full

debate in which they were discussed. In reference to these I may perhaps be allowed to say that I recognize the fact that, if the Bishops were to speak, it was not to be expected that they should speak otherwise than they have done ; and I would express my appreciation of the anxious care that was shown both in the resolutions and in many of the speeches—very notably in the Primate's—not to interfere with the freedom of genuine study. There is a certain awkwardness in writing about an issue that is past as though it were still future ; but I am afraid that in this respect I must leave the pamphlet as it was written.

W. S.

CHRIST CHURCH,

*May 9, 1914.*

## BISHOP GORE'S CHALLENGE TO CRITICISM

THE remarks which follow will be confined to the first division only of the Bishop of Oxford's open letter to his Clergy—the division which deals with Criticism. With his third division I am much inclined to agree ; with the second, I can understand and respect where I do not agree ; but with the first I am afraid that I strongly and seriously disagree.

I certainly would not deprecate the main object of the letter—its incitement to clear thinking on first principles. I do very much deprecate the conclusions that the Bishop draws from his own particular application of what he conceives to be such principles. I believe that in this, as well as in other matters, he shows sometimes too great readiness to lay blame on his fellow clergy and fellow Christians, though I note with pleasure that the later sections are more tempered and conciliatory in expression. But, apart from these reservations, I do not in general disapprove of the advice that we should set ourselves to think on large questions rather than on small ones, and especially on those that are most fundamental.

But the Bishop's letter goes some way beyond these general exhortations. It directly impugns the sincerity of a number of persons who are allowed to be good men (*The Basis*, &c., p. 25), and it goes on to make the somewhat drastic proposal that the Bishops should publish a solemn declaration expressly discountenancing the claim to freedom which these persons have put forward.

I am glad to see it stated that the past experience of the



Bishops is against such declarations (*op. cit.*, p. 26). I feel sure that their disinclination to have recourse to them is wise ; and I believe that in this instance it would be especially wise. It is only too easy, in trying to escape Scylla, to fall into Charybdis. It would be a dear price to pay for some restriction of clerical freedom, if the result were to make the ministry of the Church of England impossible for many thinking and instructed men.

It is characteristic of the Bishop's courage that he gives little thought to consequences. What little he does give is quite optimistic (*op. cit.* p. 26) ; he thinks that such a declaration would only tend to produce ' a wholesome and necessary crisis '—that a certain amount of blood-letting will do no harm. I can quite believe that the Bishop did not really intend all that the open letter seems to say. He must have considered that there are different kinds of sincerity, which on the surface at least may need some adjusting to each other. I shall try to show that even the particular kind on which he insists does not suffer. But in any case it stands rather low in the scale as compared with other kinds. It may so easily proceed from nothing more than a passive and unthinking acquiescence in what has been handed down. It is more an act of the will than an act of the mind ; it may mean the suppressing of the intellectual conscience. On the other hand, the resolute pursuit of truth requires a high and austere sincerity ; and this, I should have thought, is conspicuously displayed by those whom the Bishop condemns.

This brings me to the main points in this reply. I am prepared to maintain :

- (1) that the charge of insincerity wholly breaks down ;
- (2) that the reserves by which the Bishop seeks to vindicate his own case also break down.
- (3) I shall attempt to define more exactly than the Bishop has done the true nature of the critical propositions to which he takes exception.



(4) I shall try to meet a demand which may rightly be made of me, that I should state as frankly as I can my own position and attitude in the matter and explain the steps by which I have arrived at it.

# I

I cannot think that the Bishop of Oxford has at all thought out the question of the relation of the clergy to the Creeds. He lays especial stress on the fact that the Creeds are recited, and recited in the first person singular, as proving that a stricter degree of correspondence is to be expected in regard to them than to any other standard of belief. He does not say so in so many words, and I am not quite sure what is his opinion, but he sometimes writes as if he believed—and there are undoubtedly some people who believe—that a Christian takes his views on authority directly from the Creeds. If that were so, then no doubt form and substance would exactly coincide. Then no doubt we should have either to take the Creeds or to leave them precisely as they stand. There would be no room for anything of the nature of corrected interpretation. But as a matter of fact few persons regard the Creeds as in this sense ultimate. They are summaries of Scripture which derive their authority in the last resort from Scripture. And, if the receiving mind is to retain its independence and the value of intelligent acceptance, it must contribute some power of apprehension of its own. It must be active, and not merely passive; it must assimilate at first hand what is offered to it.

That the Creeds, as used in worship, begin with 'I believe', rather than 'We believe', is little more than an accident. It is well known that the two forms are characteristic of the difference from the first between Western Creeds and Eastern. The singular form arose from the primitive use of the Creed at baptisms, where it was a test rather than an act of worship. But in its

present-day use (except at baptisms) it is altogether an act of worship, and an act of corporate worship. When the minister leads in the recitation of the Creed, he does so in the name of, and as the representative of, the congregation. The act as a whole is a corporate act, which must be broad and comprehensive, and cannot be made to serve at the same time as a minute criterion of the faith of individuals.

The Bishop of Oxford refers to some of the arguments which are commonly employed in support of the view that certain items in the Creed or Creeds are to be taken in a sense that may be described as symbolical and not literal. It is true that these arguments are for the most part only *ad hominem*. They turn upon the construction which is to be put upon the *animus imponentis*. And here I must observe in passing that the Bishop does not really weaken the argument from the sense which is put upon the condemnatory clauses of the *Quicumque vult*. The fact that he and others are agitating for 'some change in the public recitation' of these clauses, does not do away with the other fact, that for a full generation at least they have been generally understood throughout the Church in a sense which is admittedly not that of the original.

I should not wish to lay too much stress upon this, because arguments that are only *ad hominem* are not a very exalted line to take. But the Bishop omits entirely the one argument that seems to me to be really decisive. That is the argument from *the difference of times*. Creeds composed fifteen, sixteen, seventeen centuries ago cannot possibly express with literal exactitude the mind of to-day. And conversely, the mind of to-day cannot possibly correspond with literal exactitude to the wording of the Creeds. Its whole intellectual context is different; and in the process of translating from the one context into the other differences must come in. There must be an element of what may be called *mutatis mutandis*.

There cannot easily be a better example of this than



the growth in modern times of the special science with which we are concerned, the science of criticism. Whether we like it or not, criticism has put its stamp upon the modern mind. All non-biblical history, all non-biblical narratives, are subject to criticism. Every schoolboy, every student, is trained to approach them in a critical spirit. The views universally held of the history of Greece and Rome, of Babylonia and Egypt, are critical views. It is impossible that our minds should be full of these without any extension of their influence to our manner of conceiving of the Bible. As a matter of fact, our conception of the Bible has been deeply affected. The Bishop of Oxford admits this as much as scholars in general. It could not be otherwise. But if our conception of the Bible is thus profoundly affected, our conception of the Creeds must be affected equally. The critical interpretation which holds good for the Bible must hold good also for the Creeds.

It follows that, in appropriating to our own day the language of the Creeds, we must do it through a more or less critical medium. This is not matter of opinion, but matter of fact. If we are honest with ourselves, we must accept it as such. We are therefore obliged, *volentes nolentes*, to take the Creeds in a broad general sense as subject to criticism. And in this there is no loss to religion, because a broad general sense is just what is best suited to be the living foundation of religious life and religious devotion.

The central truth which it is most important to guarantee is the true Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost ; that our Lord Jesus Christ is truly God and truly Lord, very God and at the same time very Man. I imagine that if we were to cross-question ourselves as to what we mean when we recite the Creeds, it would be something like that in its simplest terms. That is what we are all, educated and uneducated, trying to say, and what we each believe the other to be trying to say. We should



all agree that anything really less than this would be hypocritical. The man who in his heart of hearts really believed less ought not to stay where he is.

But in that great central truth all lesser truths are absorbed. In the act of worship we could not stay, if we would, to analyse and discriminate and determine what is the exact modern equivalent for the ancient faith. I will try in a moment, under the next head but one, to define more nearly what changes we have to allow for. But I should quite consent to lay it down as a condition that the total force of the central truth must not be impaired.

I distinctly recognize that a line has to be drawn. I distinctly recognize that it is the duty of the bishops to act as guardians of the common faith and to see that individuals do not diverge from it too widely. And I am sure that in practice the Bishops generally can be trusted to exercise this duty with all possible wisdom and consideration.

## II

But the Bishop of Oxford is not content with a broad general acceptance of the substance of the Creed, however genuine and heartfelt. He would require its application in minute detail; and when he is confronted with the difficulties arising from modern ways of looking at the ancient facts, he seeks to over-ride these and to maintain the old strict conditions by drawing a twofold distinction: (i) between the Old Testament and the New, and (ii) between certain clauses in the Creeds and other clauses—he allows the presence of a larger symbolical element in the first class than in the second. These distinctions we must now proceed to test.

(i) I must pay a tribute to the breadth and candour of what is said about the Old Testament.

‘I seemed to myself to see quite clearly, and still seem to myself to see quite clearly, the broad difference

between the Old Testament as prophecy and the New Testament as fulfilment in fact. I seemed to see quite clearly then that the preparatory revelation can be given as well in myth and legend and poetry and quasi-philosophical inquiry and moral tale, as in the simple record of historical fact. I do not wish to define, or ask any one else to define, where history passes back into legend or myth. They are all alike capable of being used as instruments of divine revelation or the inspiration of the Spirit of God—just as poetry or allegory is. And it is in this sense that I do unfeignedly believe, and desire that we clergy should profess our unfeigned belief, in all the Canonical Scriptures—not because I believe the Book of Jonah to be history rather than allegory, but because I believe that the Book of Jonah and each one of the canonical writings conveys, with some distinctiveness of special function, the word of God, which was spoken in many manners, through divers really inspired men who were God's instruments for His self-disclosure under the old covenant' (*op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19).

I would endorse every word of this after the first sentence. It expresses exactly what I hold, and strongly hold, myself. The point that I should wish to see stated more fully and explicitly is the initial affirmation of the difference between the Old Testament and the New. It will hardly be contended that the generally prophetic character of the Old Testament and the general prominence of fulfilment in the New Testament establishes any fundamental difference between them, so that different methods and a different measure should be applied to each. There is another passage to a similar effect.

‘It is quite true that I have always been jealous on behalf of the freedom of literary and historical criticism, strictly so called, in its application to the Bible, both the Old and the New Testament. There is a criticism, falsely so called, which is bound by its presuppositions to explain away anything miraculous in the Bible. This sort of criticism is no doubt destructive. But there is a criticism which is really open-minded and

really historical. It has largely reconstructed for us our ideas of the literature of the Old Testament and thrown a vast amount of valuable light upon the New Testament. It has, I think, shown us that there is one pseudonymous book in the New Testament, the "Second Epistle of S. Peter", and that there are discrepancies and errors of detail in the narratives of the New Testament, but it has not weakened our right to regard the New Testament narratives as strictly trustworthy historical narratives, and it has shed a vast amount of light and confirmation upon them. It has shown us, I think, that a great part of the historical narratives of the Old Testament is not strict history, but gives us what S. Gregory of Nyssa admirably calls "ideas in the form of a narrative", and, in my judgement, it has made the Old Testament incomparably better suited for spiritual edification. The writers of the early Church, and not only the Alexandrians, were fully alive to the "allegorical" character of the early narratives of Genesis, and I have always contended that we are entitled to apply a similar principle to-day, and to recognize that myth and legend and story have been instruments in the divine education of man, as well as strict history. Where the element of fact becomes of supreme significance, in the region of the Incarnation, there also the historical evidence is adequate and, to my mind, convincing' (*op. cit.*, pp. 21, 22).

This passage is one of the indications which raise my doubts as to the real flexibility and freedom from bias of the Bishop's historical criticism. The wholesale and over-emphatic references to the conclusiveness of the evidence are not promising to the eye of a scholar. The wish is too evidently father to the thought. If the Bishop brought the same clear-sightedness to bear upon the study of the New Testament that he has brought to bear on that of the Old, I submit that various expressions would have been considerably chastened. I may have occasion to come back to some points of detail presently.

One of the determining stages in the history of my own thought has been the gradually growing conviction that



it is impossible to draw any clear line of demarcation between the New Testament and the Old ; nay, that the New Testament must be even more liable to the same kind of influences as the Old, because, whereas the Old Testament writers shaped their own methods of writing history for themselves, the New Testament writers followed throughout the model of the Old Testament ; their minds were full of the Old Testament narratives, and there was a natural tendency to assimilate their own narratives to them. I may have to give some illustration of this tendency later. Even St. Luke, whose preface breathes the spirit of a sober secular historian, is entirely at one with his fellows in regard to Miracle.

(ii) The other distinction that is drawn is between different clauses in the Creeds. This is the subject of an article of some eighteen pages which Dr. Gore has contributed to the current number of *The Constructive Quarterly* (March 1914). For our purpose, however, the more summary statement in the pamphlet will be sufficient. It is in reply to a defence which is put forward on the other side.

‘ But, once more, it is said, even in the creed, you admit that statements of fact are in part symbolical. You must admit that, when you say “ He descended into hell ”, unless you believe that the dead are confined in a hollow place under the ground, you are using symbolical language about an historical event. So when you say “ He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God ”, unless you believe that heaven is over our heads, and God the Father has there a throne where the Son literally sits on His right hand [*sic*, I am not sure that there is not an apodosis missing]. . . . Human language is practically limited by what has fallen within present human experience. With regard, therefore, to what lies outside present human experience, we can only be taught, or formulate our beliefs, in *symbolical* language—language which is in a measure diverted from its original purpose. This is what S. Paul means when he says “ We see through a glass,

darkly", that is a blurred reflection of truth, as in a mental mirror, or as conveyed in a symbolic story. So it is about the being of God, or about the beginnings or endings of things ("Genesis" and "Apocalypse"), or about heaven and hell. When I say Christ ascended into heaven, I am first of all referring to a certain symbolical but actual and historical demonstration which our Lord gave to His disciples forty days after His resurrection. But when I say "He descended into hell", and also when in a more general sense I say "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth, &c.", I confess to the use of metaphor in an historical statement, because the historical statement carries me outside the world of present possible experience, and symbolical language is the only language that I can use' (pp. 19, 20).

A crucial instance for our purpose is precisely that which the Bishop has given, 'He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God.' It is agreed between us that 'sitteth on the right hand of God' is pure symbolism. But then the Bishop maintains that the first half of the clause is not pure, but what might perhaps be called 'mixed', symbolism. He is even more explicit in the article than in the pamphlet.

'So far as the first part of this clause is concerned it must be understood to refer to an historical incident, viz. that the body of Jesus Christ, forty days after His resurrection, rose before His disciples' eyes upwards from the earth and vanished. This fact, which we accept as a fact, if we believe that St. Luke grounded his narrative on good testimony, is quite of a piece with other recorded appearances' (*Constructive Quarterly*, p. 61).

Bishop Chase writes to the same effect (*The Gospels in the Light of Historical Criticism*, p. xxx) :

'Those who accept, as I accept, St. Luke's account of the Ascension interpret it as a revelation wrought out in action for the sake of the disciples.'

He goes on to quote Bishop Westcott :

'The physical elevation was a speaking parable, an eloquent symbol, but not the Truth to which it pointed

or the reality which it foreshadowed. The change which Christ revealed by the Ascension was not a change of place, but a change of state, not local but spiritual. Still, from the necessities of our human condition the spiritual change was represented sacramentally, so to speak, in an outward form.'

What I would contend for, in opposition to all this triad of writers, is that the account of the Ascension is just as much pure symbolism as that of the Session. Bishop Westcott hit the mark exactly when he said that 'the change which Christ revealed by the Ascension was not a change of place, but a change of state, not local but spiritual'. But he need not have added the sentence which follows about representation in outward form. I do not think that the evidence is sufficient to convince us that 'the physical elevation' of the Lord's body really happened as an external, objective fact. However, this raises the whole question as to the nature of Miracle, to which I shall have to come back very soon. I have no difficulty in believing that the early Christians, with the assumptions of Enoch and Elijah as fixed points in their minds, quickly came to believe that a like event must have happened to our Lord. I am becoming more and more inclined to think that we are apt to exaggerate the length of time which is required for the growth of such stories, where the moulds in which they are to be thrown are the common property of a whole community.

For these reasons I cannot accept the distinction drawn by Dr. Gore, that events of which the current accounts involve an appeal to the senses are necessarily to be taken as literally true, while those which do not involve such an appeal may be explained as symbolical.

Another argument which the Bishop presses is an appeal to the nature of the Incarnation. Because the Incarnation enhanced the dignity of the body and of all that goes with the body, therefore there is a presumption that in cases where a choice may be made between two repre-



sentations of an event one of which is bodily and the other purely spiritual, the bodily version is to be preferred. This, as I understand it, is the argument; if I am wrong, I shall perhaps be corrected. If this is the argument, I think it must be seen how little weight it carries with it. It does not follow that, because the Incarnation was bodily, therefore every act or process, or even a majority of the acts and processes connected with the Incarnation, must also have been bodily. When once we begin to doubt statements which involve a real contravention of the laws of nature, there is many a spiritual version of an event which becomes much easier to accept than the corresponding physical version. For instance, it is easier to suppose that the withering of the Fig Tree was parable rather than literal fact.

In face of these considerations I must needs think that the defensive position which it is sought to construct really breaks down. The distinctions on which it turns seem to me quite untenable. They are invented *ad hoc*, to save the common literal interpretation of points in the Gospel history, and have the artificial character of all such inventions.

### III

But if this is the case; if these temporary and precarious expedients do, as I believe, break down; if there is no tenable halting-place short of the conclusions which the Bishop of Oxford has set himself to impugn, it becomes highly important that the conclusions themselves should be stated with all possible accuracy and strictly within the limits which they claim for themselves.

I know the extreme difficulty of obtaining this. The man in the street is impatient of what he considers wire-drawn distinctions. Among the clergy there are many—especially among those who are so ready to sign memorials—who, partly from the good motives of loyalty and a wish to demonstrate in favour of their beliefs but partly also

from defective training, fail to appreciate the niceties of restrictions and qualifications. There are some, even among high-placed statesmen and scholars—and I must needs think that the Bishop of Oxford belongs to this class—who from natural habit and idiosyncrasy instinctively adopt the bolder expression and instinctively drop out of sight the limitations by which it is guarded. These causes are constantly feeding the fallacy *a dicto secundum quid ad dictum simpliciter*, and constantly leading to unconscious misrepresentation. I know that to the end of the chapter it will be said, that miracles are denied, that nature-miracles are denied, that the Virgin Birth is denied, that the Resurrection is denied, that our Lord's infallibility is denied. It would not be candid of me if I were to pretend that there is not a foundation of truth—and in one instance a considerable foundation of literal (but I would submit, only literal) truth—in each of these charges. But in every single case there is some important limitation or qualification which ought to be borne in mind whenever the charge is repeated. To omit this is always to import an element of injustice. Statements respecting others, and especially statements respecting the beliefs of others, should always be reproduced in the same meaning and with the same balance of context with which they were originally made.

Notwithstanding this inevitable and perpetual liability to misrepresentation, I will try at least once to reduce the indictment which is brought against us to its proper dimensions. I say 'brought against us', because I must begin by associating myself more definitely than I have hitherto done with the group of writers whom the Bishop has in his mind. It is only within the last two years—or rather through a process of thought spread over the last two years—that I have been led to go, or come to feel inclined to go, as far as some of them do. I am not sure that I still go quite as far. I ought perhaps to add that, if I know myself, I should say that the advance has

been mainly due to the development of my own thought, though it would be unfair not to admit that I may have been subconsciously influenced by younger writers like Professor Lake and Mr. J. M. Thompson. I have argued against them, and I found, and still find, not a little to criticize, especially in the attitude of Mr. Thompson. But still 'the dart sticks in the side'; and, when one has done arguing, one may still ask whether one has done full justice to all the facts under review. In regard to my brother professor on the foundation of the Lady Margaret at Cambridge, I had no idea, until I received his pamphlet, that he held the views he does.

The four counts with which I will attempt to deal are just those which are mentioned by the Bishop of Oxford—the 'nature-miracles', the Birth of our Lord, His bodily Resurrection, and the reluctance to use in connexion with Him the term 'infallibility'. The wider question of Miracles will come more appropriately into the next section.

I will try to say how much of truth there is in each of these counts. I will begin with the last.

The word 'infallibility' is one that, if I could, I should like to banish from theology altogether. I associate the use of it, as a rule, with complete insensibility to evidence. In most of the connexions in which it is applied it is a pure figment. The one connexion in which I could perhaps consent to use it is in regard to our Lord. But, even in this connexion, I should consider that the word was liable to mislead and that it would be better avoided. 'Infallibility' would be more appropriately used of absolute knowledge than of relative. But few things are more certain than that, by some process of Kenosis—or whatever it may be called—the knowledge that our Lord assumed would be better described as relative than as absolute. The exactly true proposition would, I think, be something of this kind: that whatever our Lord either thought or said or did was strictly in accord-



ance with the will of the Father. It is part of the will of the Father that every age should have its own appropriate range of knowledge. Our Lord assumed the particular range appropriate to the age in which He lived. I would not say that He never went beyond this. He did go beyond it. But that was the exception and not the rule. And, when He went beyond it, it was in connexion with the special purpose or circumstances of His mission, and not with reference to things in general. He does show a perfect knowledge of the mind and will of the Father; but even here He expressly states that there are some things which the Father has reserved to Himself (St. Mark xiii. 32; Acts i. 7). A statement of this kind would have the advantage of being at once strictly orthodox and scrupulously true.

In regard to the 'nature-miracles', I think that, of the two hypotheses—that they were performed by our Lord exactly as they are described, and that they came to be attributed to Him in this form by the imagination of the Early Church—the latter is the more probable. I believe that, in most of these cases *something* happened which gave rise to the story, but that the most difficult element in it was probably due to an extension of the original fact, rather than itself original. I will expound this more fully in the next section.

In regard to the Birth of our Lord, I would say that I believe most emphatically in His Supernatural Birth; but I cannot so easily bring myself to think that His Birth was (as I should regard it) unnatural. This is just a case where I think that the Gospels use symbolical language. I can endorse entirely the substantial meaning of that verse of St. Luke (i. 35): 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God.' This is deeply metaphorical and symbolical, and carries us into regions where thought is baffled. I do not doubt that the Birth

of our Lord was sanctified in every physical respect in the most perfect manner conceivable. The coming of the Only-begotten into the world could not but be attended by every circumstance of holiness. Whatever the Virgin Birth can spiritually mean for us is guaranteed by the fact that the Holy Babe was Divine. Is it not enough to affirm this with all our heart and soul, and be silent as to anything beyond ?

In like manner as to the Resurrection. The only question really at issue relates to a detail, the actual resuscitation of the dead body of the Lord from the tomb. The accounts that have come down to us seem to be too conflicting and confused to prove this. But they do seem to prove that in any case the detail is of less importance than is supposed. Because, whatever it was, the body which the disciples saw was not the natural human body that was laid in the grave. A natural human body does not pass through closed doors. Its identity would not escape recognition by intimate friends, either for a shorter time (as by Mary Magdalen) or for a longer time (as by the disciples on the way to Emmaus). No coherent and consistent view can be worked out as to the nature of the Risen Body. Various ideas were current at the time as to the manner and process of resurrection ; and this variety of ideas is reflected in the accounts that have come down to us. The central meaning of the Resurrection is just that expressed in the vision of the Apocalypse : ' I am the first and the last, and the Living one ; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore ' (Rev. i. 18). Is it not enough for us that the first disciples were convinced of this by signs which they could understand, by signs appropriate to the world of ideas in which they moved ? So much is quite certain ; and so much agrees perfectly with the whole sequel of events which follow. That the Risen Lord as Spirit still governed and inspired His Church is proved beyond question, if by nothing else, by the first-hand testimony of St. Paul—not

only by his own experience, but by the experience of the Christian Church around him. All this, I repeat, is verifiable history. But we may go on disputing for ever as to the exact mode in which the Resurrection of our Lord was accomplished, as we shall never know the exact manner of our own resurrection.

My own advice, so far as I may presume to give it, would be that we should abstain from logomachies, that we should not attempt to draw precarious inferences ourselves and still less force upon others inferences which they do not draw, but concentrate our strength on what is vital and verifiable.

#### IV

My hands have been forced by the acute crisis raised by Bishop Gore. I have for some time felt myself gravitating towards the conclusions to which I have given expression. I was bound to make them public sooner or later ; but I should have been glad if it could have been later rather than sooner. The main lines have been becoming more and more clear to me ; but I do not consider that I have worked them out fully from all sides. Only the fact that Bishop Gore seeks to preclude the very conclusions to which I feel myself coming, only his sweeping condemnation of just those workers with whom I am most in sympathy, has compelled me to anticipate the moment that I should naturally have chosen and to lay before the world, or so much of the world as may be interested, the line of thought by which my mind has been travelling. I feel that I must now do this.

The particular results that I have mentioned are all parts or incidents in a comprehensive inquiry into the general subject of Miracles and the Supernatural. All my career has really been leading up to this subject ; but I made up my mind from the first to approach it in a deliberate and gradual way. I thought that I would



not attack the central problem first, but last. Whatever might be the best method for others, I had little doubt that this was the best for me.

I began at the foot of the ladder. I first sought to make myself at home in the field of the Lower Criticism, and then to rise to the Higher. I thought that the first thing we wanted was accurate texts, and then to assign these texts to their proper surroundings in place and time. This was preliminary to the construction of an historical background. But everything that could be regarded as *a priori* or philosophical I was content to leave in suspense.

Thus, in the article 'Jesus Christ' in Hastings, *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. ii (reprinted as *Outlines of the Life of Christ* in 1905), I confined myself to the positive statement of the evidence for the Gospel Miracles. This attitude was preserved in *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel*, also published in 1905. The first at all systematic survey of the subject is in *The Life of Christ in Recent Research* (Oxford, 1907). This really contains all the guiding ideas that I have ever had on the subject, though at an early stage and not yet bound together in a constructive theory. My chief interest was still historical and evidential, but I tried to embrace a general view of the idea of Miracle, in profane history, in the Old Testament and in the New. It could not be said of me that my attitude was based 'on a mistaken view of natural law, and on something much less than a Christian belief in God' (*op. cit.*, p. 9). At least, I was not disposed to put any limit to the Divine power or to ascribe any necessity to natural law as such. I did not for a moment doubt the power of God to make what exceptions He pleased. I only asked for better evidence of His will to make them. And much seemed to turn on the nature of the exceptions. I was perfectly ready to accept and believe whatever could be explained by the operation of a higher cause in the course of nature. But as we see the Divine Providence in action, the higher cause never *contradicts* the lower.

It overrules it and diverts it from its original direction, but it never breaks the proper sequence of cause and effect. This is not only our own experience from day to day and from hour to hour ; it is overwhelmingly confirmed by the experience of all the centuries since the growth of natural science. The question was whether the same principle held good in remoter ages. There was a certain amount of ostensible evidence against the presumption that it did. But in the light of historical criticism this evidence seemed little by little to fall to pieces. It was first given up over the whole field of profane history. There is a strong feeling that it has also given way for the Old Testament. There was abundant evidence for the operation of higher spiritual causes ; but when it came to a breach of the physical order, the evidence was always found to be insufficient. The evidence itself could be accounted for without assuming that the breach was real. An excellent description of the state of things for the Old Testament is that which is given by the Bishop of Oxford in the paragraph quoted above (p. 11). It is not likely that the general public should quite understand the real situation : it is no longer the Bible over against all other literature and history ; but the miracles of the New Testament—or rather, one small group of these miracles—stand virtually alone.

By degrees there had hardened in my mind a distinction which is perhaps most conveniently expressed as a distinction between events that are *supra naturam*—exceptional, extraordinary, testifying to the presence of higher spiritual forces—and events, or alleged events, that are *contra naturam*, or involve some definite reversal of the natural physical order.

If it is urged that this is reading back modern ideas into the distant past, I reply that that is undoubtedly true, but that we do so in regard to other departments of history, and that the process is in fact unavoidable. We are obliged to go back behind the narratives that

have come down to us and to apply to them the standards of our own age, which in the treatment of evidence are more exacting.

The problem is greatly simplified when once the distinction just drawn is applied as a criterion to miracles. There were broad tracts of miracles over which the evidence was really decisive. For instance, wherever we have the direct evidence of St. Paul that evidence is immediate and cannot be questioned. But then, when we came to look into it, these miracles were at once seen to come under the head *supra naturam*. They were abundantly accounted for by the presence in the world of a unique Personality, and by that wave of new spiritual force which flowed from it in ever-increasing volume. They involved no real breach in the order of nature. It was only that tiny group of miracles that I have described as *contra naturam* that did imply any such breach. By the observance of this distinction the subject was greatly narrowed down.

I had come to see as much as this when it fell to me to read a paper on Miracles at the Church Congress at Middlesbrough in 1912. After the Congress the progress of my thought was rapid. I soon realized that it was once more a question of the balance of evidence ; but this time the balance seemed to be more and more overwhelming. If we isolate the group of miracles that are really *contra naturam*, it is found to be exceedingly small. It is just that group which the Bishop of Oxford accuses his opponents of denying, but in regard to which we have seen (pp. 18-21 *supra*) that the denial is very qualified and limited. In each case a large element of substantial truth remains.

Isolating this group of *contra naturam* miracles, what is the nature of the evidence for it ? It is the evidence of men whose minds were steeped in the Old Testament ; for whom the Old Testament was the standing model ; whose thoughts naturally ran into the moulds which the



Old Testament supplied. It seems to me that this one consideration is enough to explain all the so-called 'nature-miracles'.

By far the most important of these is the Feeding of the Five Thousand. I quite agree that the evidence for this miracle is peculiarly strong. The presence of two versions of the same miracle, with so little deviation, in the Gospel of St. Mark proves that it took hold very early. But what does the proof really amount to? I do not doubt for a moment that the story represents a real event. This real event was in any case a consecrated meal. I must not stay to discuss the subject at length; but I believe there is reason to think that such meals played a larger part in the intercourse of our Lord with His disciples than the narratives that have come down to us would lead us to suppose. I suspect that in this way the Last Supper was led up to; it was not only a last supper but a last eucharist; it was a last dominical eucharist as well as the institution of a eucharist for the Church of all time. The phrase 'He was known of them in breaking of the bread' (St. Luke xxiv. 35) suggests that such solemn 'breakings of bread' had happened before. I can well believe that on one (or more) of these occasions the consecrated meal was accompanied by a discourse which supplied the foundation for that of which we have a record in St. John vi.

The story is thus full of genuine historical matter. I believe, with Schweitzer, that the substance of it is all historical, except the one phrase 'and they were all filled' (with the details which go with it). This preternatural filling is the only addition. Where does it come from? I have little doubt that it comes from the stories of multiplied food in the Old Testament narratives of Elijah and Elisha, and especially from the story of the man of Baal-shalishah in 2 Kings iv. 42-4. It is worth while to remind ourselves that these narratives of Elijah and Elisha, though they contain some very doubtful

stories of miracle, contain also a number of magnificent spiritual lessons (1 Kings xviii. 15, 21; xix. 11-14; xx. 11, 13; xxi. 17-21, 27-9; xxii. 14-28, &c., &c.). The other nature-miracles are still easier.

There remain, then, in this category of *contra naturam* miracles only the two great events, the Supernatural Beginning and the Supernatural Ending of the Lord's earthly career. It was precisely in this order that I came to consider them, at the end of a long train of reasoning in regard to Miracles and the Supernatural in general. This was the point that I had reached. The whole class of *supra naturam* miracles was in principle secured. It would be only human if the records that have come down to us presented some exaggerations in detail. But these can be easily allowed for. The occurrence of not a few—if we take both the Life of our Lord and the Apostolic Age together I would say, of very many—miracles of this kind is, I think, conclusively proved. Not so with the group that I call *contra naturam*. I have said that in the New Testament this group is really small. The conception of such miracles took its rise in the region of the Old Testament. If we think a moment, it was inevitable that such a conception should arise in a primitive age. Take one little incident in illustration. It is a well-known fact that, owing to the strong specific gravity of its waters, things will float in the Dead Sea that will not float elsewhere. I do not know whether iron is one of these things; but at all events something like iron may have been seen to float in these waters that would have sunk in others. That would be at once regarded as a miracle, and would easily give rise to such a story as that of 2 Kings vi. 1-7. There could not well be a better example of St. Augustine's *Omnia quippe portenta contra naturam dicimus esse; sed non sunt. . . . Portentum ergo fit non contra naturam, sed contra quam est nota natura* (de Civ. Dei, xxi. 8). I do not say that St. Augustine meant exactly what we may mean in applying his words;

but at least he may suggest our meaning. I must not stay to enlarge on this any more than on other details that have come before us. But I think we can see the genesis of this class of miracles. They took their rise in the Old Testament period. They thus became a fixed type, which perpetuated itself in the New Testament. There is nothing in this, paradoxical as it may seem, that is not entirely in accordance with God's way of dealing with men. His ways are not as our ways, and His thoughts are not as our thoughts. We should not, antecedently, expect Him to bring truth out of legend ; but, as a matter of fact, He has most certainly done so. The course of history proves that certain modes of expression that have prevailed over long periods were not intended to be permanent. It is not right that they should be denied or described as untrue. The language of the past has had all through, and still has, a relative justification ; I would blame no one who still thinks that he ought to use it. It is not so much negatived as superseded.

These considerations may help to prepare us for coming back to the question, which I know is a very tender one, as to the two cardinal events, the Supernatural Birth and the Supernatural Resurrection. I may be permitted to remind my readers how I came myself to raise and to face this question. It was only at the end of a long inquiry into matters of less urgent moment. But it was quite impossible for me to stop there. And it was quite impossible for me to dismiss from my mind the *praejudicium* which had been gradually forming itself against the permanent validity of the conception of miracles *contra naturam*.

But, after all, the *contra naturam* element was only a part—and I may be permitted to say, a small part—of these great events. It is from our modern standpoint that it becomes a small part. In ancient times it seemed necessary to the completeness of the idea, but it is so no longer. The element that we seem likely to lose has done



its work and can be spared. It is like a lame man laying aside his crutches.

Two things I would ask leave to do. I would ask leave to affirm once more my entire and strong belief in the central reality of the Supernatural Birth and the Supernatural Resurrection. No one believes in these things more strongly than I at least wish to believe in them.

But also, at the cost of repetition, I must ask to be allowed to say again what I have said already. My excuse is that I know it is hopeless to escape a certain measure of misrepresentation. I shall not complain of those who misrepresent me; because I have already appealed to a Higher Power. But I must in candour add that, although I believe emphatically in a Supernatural Birth and a Supernatural Resurrection, and in all that follows from these beliefs, I know that is not all that the Church of the past has believed. I must not blink this fact. I hope that I believe all that the Church's faith has stood for; but I could not, as at present advised, commit myself to it as literal fact.

There is one other point to which I must go back for a moment. Bishop Gore wrote that 'the rejection of the nature-miracles . . . cuts so deep into the historical character of the Gospel narrative, the record of the words as well as the works of our Lord, that nothing like the distinctive confidence of the Christian creed could be maintained' (*op. cit.*, p. 10). I hope that, if what I have said has been attentively and charitably followed, it will be seen that I at least do not share in this opinion. The Bishop and his more immediate following may think that the points of difference between us are so important that the words just quoted cover my position as well as that of others. But when once a critical view of the Gospel history has been adopted, I think it will be seen that such a reconstruction as I propose involves a minimum of change and abruptness of transition. It happens that at the time when the Bishop's pamphlet appeared I was

actually planning an essay the object of which would be to show that some of the leading German scholars have, as I believe through a mistake of method, fallen into a treatment of the Gospels that is more negative than it ought to be. I believe that (in spite of the concessions I have made above) 'in a fair field and with no favour' the broad lines of the Gospel tradition and the broad lines of the Christian faith verify and establish themselves.

The mention of the Germans leads me to the further remark that Bishop Gore has either forgotten or deliberately taken no account of them. It is surely a fact of some significance that the Protestant scholars of the foremost nation of the world for penetrating thoughtfulness, thoroughness, and technical knowledge, have arrived with a considerable degree of unanimity just at the kind of conclusions which the Bishop condemns. Yet Germany has been at work on these problems for more than a century past like a hive of bees. Those who care to see what one of the best and most cautious of the Germans thinks about them may see it in the little volume of lectures delivered at Oberlin College, Ohio, by Dr. Friedrich Loofs, Professor of Church History at Halle (*What is the Truth about Jesus Christ?* Scribner's, 1913).

I have not myself any fault to find with the German attitude, unless it is that it is rather too academic, and has rather too much of the rigour of the lecture-room. On the other hand, its great merit is that it is strictly *sachgemäß*; it does not condescend to smartness or playing to the gallery. I would make bold to claim that our critical English scholars of the left wing, including especially those named by the Bishop of Oxford, are not less deserving of the respect and gratitude of their countrymen. There is nothing wanton about them, nothing supercilious, nothing cynical; they obey their conscience, and go where their conscience leads them; they are evidently, all of them, genuinely religious men and good Christians.

I would say of all but one (so far as I know) of those who have written on these subjects that they show an anxious desire to conserve all that can be rightly conserved of the old beliefs. And so much at least I would claim for myself.

If it is said that what I have written is Modernism, I would reply that I believe—I emphatically and hopefully believe—that a sound and right Modernism is really possible;—that the Saviour of mankind extends His arms towards the cultivated modern man just as much as He does towards the simple believer. I believe that the cultivated modern man may enter the Church of Christ with his head erect—with some change of language due to difference of times, but all of the nature of reinterpretation of old truths, and without any real equivocation at his heart. I believe that he can afford to say what he really thinks—provided only that his fellow Christians of more traditional types are willing to greet him with the sympathetic intelligence which he deserves, and do not turn towards him the cold shoulder of suspicion and denunciation.

For the moment I know that the suggestions I have made will come with a shock to the great mass of Christians; but in the end I believe that they will be thankfully welcomed. What they would mean is that the greatest of all stumbling-blocks to the modern mind is removed, and that the beautiful regularity that we see around us now has been, and will be, the law of the Divine action from the beginning to the end of time. There has been just this one little submerged rock in our mental navigation of the universe. If we look at it from a cosmical standpoint, how infinitesimal does it seem! And yet that one little rock has been the cause of many a shipwreck of faith. If it is really taken out of the way, the whole expanse of the ocean of thought will be open and free.

The ultimate goal is the unification of thought, the



fusion of all secular thinking and all religious thinking in one comprehensive and harmonious system. If I am not mistaken such a unification is nearer in sight than it has been for a very long time. If the concessions I have made look like an encroachment from the secular side, they are perhaps only part of the process of dovetailing which precedes fusion.

I must confess that I began this pamphlet in an indignant mood. I have tried to remove the traces of this, and I shall be glad if I have in some measure succeeded. Apart from that, the process of expounding views that one knows will excite opposition and perhaps some obloquy can hardly help being a turbid process. As I look back I am conscious of having passed through more than one turbid vein both in writing and in thinking. But, as I bring what I have written to an end, I hope that I can do so on the noble note of *Samson Agonistes*,

With calm of mind, all passion spent.

For any sins of thought or of word of which I may have been guilty, at any stage of this controversy, I humbly ask forgiveness.

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